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A CRITICISM OF HIS OPINIONS AS EXPRESSED IN "THOUGHTS ON PARLIAMENTARY REFORM."

BY A WESTMINSTER ELECTOR.

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W. RIDGWAY, 169, PICCADILLY.
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The following pages were in type prior to the late General Election, but were withheld from publication, from a sense of the necessity for thorough unanimity in support of Mr. Mill. To secure his re-election seemed so important on many considerations, that it was felt advisable to waive even some important points of difference. The experience of the recent elections has not rendered the demand for the ballot unnecessary. It appears that corruption on an extensive scale is beginning to operate in constituencies hitherto regarded as free from that evil, while intimidation, especially in the counties, has assumed proportions previously unknown. As a preventive of such unconstitutional practices, and also of that lavish expenditure which, though not perhaps strictly illegal, is contrary to the spirit of the constitution and destructive of freedom of election, the writer knows no remedy equal to the ballot. He therefore ventures, as a supporter of Mr. Mill in 1865 and 1868, to submit his reasons for dissenting from Mr. Mill's conclusions respecting the ballot.

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Mr. Mill, in his "Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform," denies the necessity of the ballot, and condemns it as likely to produce serious moral and social evils. He says: "I hope to show sufficient reasons why this should be included, not among the things which ought, but among those which ought not, to form part of a measure for reforming the representation. It appears to me that secret suffrage—a very right and justifiable demand when originally made—would at present, and still more in time to come, produce far greater evil than good."

The conversion of so eminent a radical as Mr. Mill from the advocacy of secret voting deserves the more careful consideration of all sincere reformers, inasmuch as his condemnation of the ballot has been vaunted by all its opponents, especially by those who dissent entirely from his general opinions. It is therefore intended in these pages to examine his reasons for this change, in order to ascertain whether they are sufficient to render a demand which thirty years since was "right and justifiable," the contrary at the present time. Circumstances may have changed entirely; if so, it is folly to persevere in a needless and profitless agitation. If, however, the same evils still predominate in our elec-

toral system which thirty years since made the demand for the ballot "right and justifiable," the agitation in its behalf must be pursued with renewed vigour.

"The operation of the ballot is," says Mr. Mill, "that it enables the voter to give full effect to his own private preferences, whether selfish or disinterested, under no inducement to defer to the opinions or wishes of others except as these may influence his own. It follows, and the friends of the ballot have always said, that secrecy is desirable in cases in which the motives acting on the voter through the will of others are likely to mislead him, while, if left to his own preferences, he would vote as he ought. It equally follows, and is also the doctrine of the friends of the ballot, that when the voter's own preferences are apt to lead him wrong, but the feeling of responsibility to others may keep him right, not secrecy, but publicity, should be the rule." Of course in a state of perfect freedom every individual will act according to his own private preferences: the selfish man will give a selfish vote, the public-spirited man will seek to give effect to his convictions of public policy. A sense of responsibility is, no doubt, created by open voting, but of responsibility to whom? In the vast majority of instances not to the public, but to the landlord, the customer, or the creditor of the voter. Further, how is this sense of responsibility awakened in the case of a selfish man by open voting? Is it by arousing his conscience or by working upon his fears? The pressure of "responsibility" may come, not from one individual, but from many: in either case the result is the same, the voter does not give an independent vote, but yields to the pressure of others.

The vote is either a right or a trust; if a right, there is, no doubt, a corresponding duty involved

—the duty of exercising that right for the public benefit. The task, however, of judging how to exercise his vote belongs to the individual voter, uninfluenced by any other considerations than those of reason and justice. It is not by exciting the fears, but by cultivating the feeling of responsibility, that selfishness is to be cured. This may be done far more effectually by means of secret than by open voting. In the former case, the community says, in effect, we have entrusted you with a vote; you must use that vote according to your conscience; here are our reasons for this or that course; judge, decide, and act according to the convictions they produce. The question whether the voter has a tendency to go right or wrong has not any bearing on the object of secret voting, which is to secure freedom of choice. Moreover, on the principle that men are held innocent till proved guilty, it is to be assumed that an unbiassed voter will do right to the best of his convictions. A jury does not act dishonestly because its deliberations are secret; it has yet to be proved that secret voting will encourage selfish and corrupt influences.

It is not, as Mr. Mill asserts, for the reason above quoted that no one approves of vote by ballot in Parliament itself. The representative and the represented occupy different positions; the former is the servant of the latter (or ought to be—open voting in many instances changes their relative position), and is directly responsible, for every vote, to those in whose behalf he acts. Publicity is not necessary, in this case, that the member of Parliament may be influenced by "the opinion which will be formed of his conduct by other people," but in order that his employers may know how he fulfils his trust, and may exercise their legitimate influence upon

his conduct as a representative. Moreover, electors have a right to withdraw their support from a member who does not represent them. There is no corresponding right in the case of an elector who votes against the will of others, whether few or many.

It is unfortunately as true now as it was "thirty years ago" that one of the main evils "to be guarded against is that which the ballot would exclude—coercion by landlords, employers, and customers"—although we do not believe this to have been, even then, altogether the sole or "the main evil." Then, as now, a "much greater source of evil" was the selfishness or the selfish partialities of the voter himself, fostered as they were and are by all the evils attendant upon open voting.

Mr. Mill says: "A 'base and mischievous vote' is now, I am convinced, much oftener given from the voter's personal interest, or class interest, or some mean feeling in his own mind, than from any fear of consequences at the hands of others: and to these evil influences the ballot would enable him to yield himself up free from all sense of shame or responsibility." It may be true that corruption is in certain constituencies more prevalent than intimidation; it will, however, generally be found that they go hand in hand together: where one prevails the other is rarely or never absent. Let the records of election committees, in which the guilt of a small portion only of the constituencies has been disclosed—the experience of nearly every candidate at a contested election—the confessions, if they can be had, of election agents—bear witness on this point. It is a well known fact, that under open voting all the evils of which Mr. Mill complains have increased and are increasing; each succeeding election becomes more and more costly; and his own election for Westminster is

regarded as an exceptional event. Could the state of things be worse if the ballot were what he represents it?

Moreover, it must be felt that in this sentence Mr. Mill expresses despair of the public conscience, and distrust of individual liberty. His arguments may be perfectly sound against investing such men with the franchise, but not against their free exercise of the power of voting when it is bestowed upon them. There are, however, two sides to the question, and, unless the writer is very much mistaken, the effect of the ballot, if those who believe in a free election are true to their mission, will be to create, not to destroy, a sense of responsibility. The voter must be impressed by public opinion with the conviction that the exercise of his vote is a matter solely resting between himself, his country, his conscience, and his God, and that consequently he alone is responsible and not another.

Is it not equally true now, as "in times not long gone by," that "the higher and richer classes" are "in complete possession of the government—their power the master grievance of the country?" In former times, as now, a few eminent men were returned to Parliament on popular principles; but the vast majority of our rulers now, as then, belong to the favoured class, who believe themselves the hereditary rulers and governors of the people. In the vast majority of counties the politics of the great landowners decide the representation: tenants at will are driven to the poll like flocks of sheep; indeed, it would be more honest at once to give the landlords the votes, and let each vote at the poll according to the number of his tenants, than to uphold a system of voting which is a mockery and a delusion. It was to preserve the power of the landlord that voting-papers were introduced by the peers during

the progress of the recent Reform Bill through their Lordships' house, although, according to very good evidence, they are unnecessary for the purpose. A Northern gentleman, of great influence in his locality, told the writer that he did not care whether they were adopted or not: at the last election he polled every voter in his village but one for his side, that one being the only independent elector, a retired draper who had "squatted down" in the place, and who, according to recent lights, had no right at all in a County Constituency. In boroughs, with few exceptions, the bankers, lawyers, creditors, and customers of the various tradesmen, and the employers of workmen, control a considerable portion of the electors. Even magistrates do not hesitate to coerce the officials of gaols and other public institutions. If Mr. Mill had taken any active part in canvassing the electors of Westminster in 1865, his belief in the advantages of open voting would have been considerably shaken.

All that Mr. Mill urges in favour of conscientious votes, given under such circumstances, is most admirable. His mistake consists in thinking that the evils for which he admits the ballot is a remedy existed in former times alone. They are as powerful now as then; the higher classes have deluded the middle classes with the semblance of power, and have succeeded in remaining masters of the country. An analysis of the existing House of Commons is sufficient to prove this fact. Moreover, when we consider the extremities to which the country has to be brought before any great measure of Reform is attained, can we for a moment assume that power rests with the middle classes? They were convinced of the necessity of free

trade in corn long before the year 1846; yet it is well known that it required the Irish Famine with all its horrors to secure that great measure of justice. Why has Parliamentary Reform been so long delayed? All the constituencies, in which the middle class predominates, long since declared for Household Suffrage. It was the undue power of the higher classes alone which delayed the boon. Against this power it is that the advocates of every measure of Reform have most to contend; and this is the reason why session after session is wasted in fruitless efforts to obtain civil, religious, and legislative improvements which the majority of the country has endorsed.

Would that it were true that "at every election the votes are more and more the voters' own!" Were this the case there could be no possible objection to the use of voting papers. If men are really independent—if "a good tenant can now feel that he is as valuable to his landlord as his landlord is to him—if a prosperous tradesman can afford to feel independent of any particular customer," and give a perfectly independent vote, he could do so under the proposed system of voting papers. The absence of this feeling of independence is at once the most conclusive argument against their introduction, and in favour of secret voting.

The "unassailable" argument against the ballot because of the limitation of the constituencies is more specious than sound. If it be the right of the voter under an extended suffrage to act on his own judgment, influenced solely by the opinions of others in so far as he arrives at the same conclusions, it is so now. Coercion, whether exercised by the few or the many, is equally objectionable: argument will exercise its due weight whether the system of voting be open or secret.

Moreover, the analogy between representative and voter is imperfect: if the former do not satisfy his constituents, he probably loses their support at future elections; the only influence that can be used against the voter is intimidation or coercion. Would special interests or class questions be more or less likely to have due weight if the operation of all undue influences were withdrawn?

It is no doubt true that all who are fit to influence electors are not fit for that reason to be electors; and hence it may safely be assumed that they will in all probability seek their ends by undue influence. A combination of working men may as effectually ruin a tradesman as a single wealthy customer; such combinations have frequently been threatened and have sometimes been put into actual practice. They are very likely to be employed under the system of open voting, but with the ballot would be impossible. Non-electors would then be compelled to rely upon arguments instead of threats, and it is almost certain that they would more readily attain their ends whenever those ends were right and just.

Mr. Mill makes a great mistake in supposing that "public opinion" exercises its due influence by means of open voting. The direct contrary is, we believe, the fact, open voting being a most powerful instrument in opposition to the due influence of public opinion. It may bring a steadying influence to work against pressure: those, however, who work against the pressure of public opinion are the few who steadily set themselves to convert the public from an erroneous to a sound opinion. Under any circumstances, under any constituency and form of voting their work would be the same; and, unless we are very much mistaken,

those who thus work against pressure most desire the ballot, that their work may not be fruitless. The pressure against which the ordinary voter has to work is that of his landlord, customer, creditor, or employer.

Mr. Mill has written ably on individual liberty: surely the individual elector has, even under universal suffrage, the right to his own judgment. An aggregate of selfish units will not lose their selfishness, because they all have power. If they are unwise and disposed to tyrannise, the protection of the ballot may be more necessary than it is under an oligarchy. The tyranny of the many may be used quite as effectually as that of the few; and even under the widest franchise secret voting may be more than ever necessary as a safeguard of freedom.

The possible tyranny of the majority has been most forcibly commented upon by Mr Mill himself. In his noble essay on "Liberty" he says: "Society can and does execute its own mandates, and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all, in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life and enslaving the soul itself. Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling—against the tendency of society to impose by other means than civil penalties its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel

all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own. There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence, and to find that limit and maintain it against encroachment is as indispensible to a good condition of human affairs as protection against political despotism."

The limits of the power which society has a right to exercise over the individual voter are capable of very easy definition. The only control to which he is amenable is that of public opinion: this control secret voting fully recognises. The only influence to which it is opposed is that which seeks, by fear of consequences, to induce him to vote contrary to his convictions. Under universal suffrage this influence may be far more powerful than it is under the present electoral system. Secret voting recognises only the employment of moral influence. Open voting, it is true, recognises that influence, but also, in addition thereto, the influence of intimidation, loss of social position, and all the countless evils that swell the "tyranny of the majority." The strong defy these influences, but all are not strong: hence the necessity for protecting freedom of election by means of secret voting.

It is true that "a great number of the electors will have two sets of preferences—those on private, and those on public grounds; but it is not true that "the last are the only ones which the elector would like to avow." All who have had experience in elections must admit that the former are frequently avowed. If an elector has no definite opinions, private friendship or obligation will decide his vote under any circumstances. Nor is it true that votes will be given from "malice or pique" more readily in secret than openly: nothing is more striking than the readiness with which voters who

are so actuated avow their motives. Cases may exist in which "the only restraint upon a majority of knaves consists in their involuntary respect for the opinion of an honest minority;" but experience does not show that the opinion of such a minority has much power in restraining the knavery of those who traffic in votes. It is incumbent upon all who oppose the ballot to show that these evils are prevented by open voting. Experience proves that every one of them grows and flourishes under the present system. Even were it admitted that Mr. Mill's predictions might be verified if the ballot were employed, it cannot be denied that open voting has not hitherto proved a means of securing either integrity in the elector or freedom of election. Neither can it be admitted that the case for the ballot "is continually becoming still weaker"; on the contrary, it becomes daily stronger. Every evil for which the ballot is the remedy is strengthened by use, and no better device for curing an honest man of a partiality for open voting can be found than to induce him to embark actively in the management of a contested election.

Whatever may be the case in England and Scotland, it must be admitted that the ballot is as necessary in Ireland now as it was thirty years since. The employment of the military to escort voters to the poll, avowedly for the purpose of enabling them to vote according to their desires, for their landlords, but more probably, as is alleged, to compel them to vote against their convictions, is an evil for which the ballot would prove a remedy. If the electors wish to vote for the nominee of their landlord, they can do so under the protection of the ballot; but if they would prefer to vote on the other side, there is certainly no freedom of

election under present circumstances. Election riots, moreover, are not unknown in England: quiet voters are frequently intimidated by mob violence who would, if voting were secret, be able to record their votes in peace.

Mr. Mill stigmatises the ballot as a "necessary evil: necessary," he says, "it might have been, but an evil it could never fail to be." Why? If all men were honest and perfectly independent, it would be quite immaterial whether votes were given openly or secretly. In that case no one would seek to interfere with his neighbour otherwise than by the pressure of legitimate argument. In itself, under such circumstances, the ballot would be neither better nor worse than open voting.

If the ballot be an evil, it is so in the sense in which many other necessary things are evils. It is not to be affirmed that locks, bars, and bolts, magistrates, police officers, and prisons, are abstractedly good in themselves. If all mankind were honest, there would be no necessity for any one of them. No one, however, dreams of dispensing with them—at present at all events: they are necessary evils equally with secret voting. If none sought to exercise undue or improper influence, the ballot would not be required. It is to be feared, however, that we are as far removed from that millenium as we are from the time when locks will be abandoned as unnecessary.

Neither is it true that concealment is an evil which "the moral sentiment of mankind, in all periods of enlightened morality, has condemned." There are occasions in which it becomes a virtue. The highest authority urges that some actions are to be performed in secret, and the left hand is not to know what the

right hand doeth. Condemnation of secret voting, however, will be found in the main to proceed not from those who are most enlightened in their morality, but from those who know that their power, influence, and gain will be destroyed by the ballot. The politician who depends solely upon the strength of his arguments and the truth of his convictions knows that his influence will be strengthened by the adoption of secret voting, and by the consequent destruction of the undue influences which are his great obstacles.

Mr. Mill, however, does not condemn concealment, if required by some overpowering motive. Is not the desire to give an honest vote without the risk of reducing a wife and family to beggary a motive sufficiently overpowering? The majority of men are not heroes, they probably hold no strong political opinions; they are, however, amenable to reason, and hence the necessity for removing the possibility of undue influence. Legislation must be adapted, not to the necessities of the strong, but to those of the weak.

Mr. Mill urges, that "disguise in all its forms is a badge of slavery." It would be more correct to affirm that secrecy is the refuge of the weak against the strong. On the side of the oppressors there is power, supported, if not sanctioned, by the law. It may well be that the small tradesman whose premises are invaded by half-a-dozen leading men—one of them, in all probability, able by a word to turn him and his family into the street—desires the protection of the ballot; but it is hardly just to designate him as a slave, or as having the soul of a slave, because he seeks in secrecy the means of voting according to his convictions. If he had the soul of a slave he would feel no desire to throw off his yoke. The effect of open voting upon the political morality of

tradesmen may be judged from the fact, that many of them habitually consult their ledger before giving their votes.

Mr. Mill's strongest argument, and his last, is that the ballot, if necessary, could only produce its effect at the price of much lying. It is true that a man who asks an impertinent question is very apt to receive an evasive answer, if not a direct untruth. The remedy, however, for this evil is not to be found in open voting. The record of broken promises at every contested election would disclose a considerable amount of lying. The question "How did you vote?" is one to which no one has a right to expect an answer, especially if the intention of the question is the infliction of injury in case of an unsatisfactory reply. The true remedy for this evil is to create such a condition of public opinion as shall make it considered a disgrace for an honourable man to put the question.

Moreover, it is difficult to imagine that English gentlemen would directly question those whom they might be able to influence in order to ascertain how they had voted. The influence which the system of open voting gives them is, no doubt, used for purposes of intimidation, and in some instances power is now employed to punish disobedient voters. It cannot, however, be supposed that any man of position and influence would be so lost to all sense of honour as deliberately to call on his dependents and put them to the question after an election. We believe that if the publication of the votes were even deferred for twelve months, instances of such oppression would be rare; they are usually perpetrated before the heat of the contest has subsided; reflection generally induces wiser counsels.

One great advantage of the ballot would be the legal

recognition that all undue influence is wrong. Its adoption would be a declaration of the fact that the franchise has been bestowed upon the voter because it is considered that he is qualified to use it rightly. Public conscience is moulded to a great extent by law. Whatever the law sanctions the majority of people consider right. If the law favours the exercise of undue influence and the employment of corrupt practices, they will flourish and increase; if, on the other hand, it places its veto upon them, as it would by the adoption of the ballot, they will certainly be considerably diminished.

The moment any tampering is allowed with individual voters, it becomes difficult to prevent the exercise of undue influence. Freedom of election means, in the opinion of many, the right of the inferior to vote according to the will of the superior. If it be right for the pressure of public opinion, as Mr. Mill asserts, to be brought to bear upon the voter in order to induce him to vote in opposition to his private wishes, is it wrong for the influence of an individual to be so employed? The supporter of coercion always urges that he acts in the real interest of the elector whom he coerces. He believes the candidate that he supports is the best qualified to represent the constituency, and if influence upon individual electors is employed at all, where shall we define its limits?

The recent charge of Mr. Baron Bramwell to the jury in the case of the operative tailors contains some observations peculiarly appropriate to the question of intimidation at elections. "There was no right" (said the learned judge) "in this country under our law so sacred as the right of personal liberty. No right of property or capital, about which there had been so much

declamation, was so sacred or so carefully guarded by the law as that of personal liberty. They were quite aware of the pains taken, first by the common law—by the writ, as it was called, of *habeas corpus*—and supplemented by statute, to secure to every man his personal freedom—that he should not be put in prison without lawful cause, and that if he was he should be brought before a competent magistrate, within a given time, and be set at liberty or undergo punishment. But that liberty was not liberty of the body only: it was also liberty of the mind and will; and the liberty of a man's mind and will, to say how he should bestow himself and his means, his talents and his industry, was as much a subject of the law's protection as was that of his body. Generally speaking, the way in which people had endeavoured to control the operations of the minds of men was by putting restraints on their bodies, and therefore we had not so many instances in which the liberty of the mind was vindicated as was that of the body. Still, if any set of men agreed among themselves to coerce that liberty of mind and thought by compulsion and restraint, they would be guilty of a criminal offence; he laid it down as clear and undoubted law, that if two or more persons agreed that they would, by coercion or compulsion, co-operate together against that liberty they would be guilty of an indictable offence." Applying the principles he had laid down to the case before him, the learned judge went on to say he was of opinion that if picketing should be done in a way which excited no reasonable alarm, or did not coerce or annoy those who were the subjects of it, it would be no offence in law. It was perfectly lawful for the defendants to endeavour to persuade persons to act with them who had not

hitherto so acted, provided that persuasion did not take the shape of compulsion or coercion. What was the object, then, of this picketing? Was it that the names and addresses of the non-striking workmen might be found out with a view to their being addressed by reasonable argument and persuasion, or was it for the purpose of coercion and intimidation? Substitute "canvassing" for picketing, and the application of the law to the offence against which the ballot is intended to guard, is complete in reference to electoral intimidation. "As it is essential," says Blackstone, "to the very being of Parliament that elections should be absolutely free, therefore all undue influences upon the electors are illegal and strongly prohibited." Experience unfortunately proves that the rich and educated do not scruple to use undue influences—"picketing" the voters by means of organised canvassing, and even condescending upon occasion to "rattening" if persuasion fails; an offence which ought to be regarded with the same indignation that was provoked by the outrages of Broadhead and his associates. As a security against this evil, can any method be devised so certain as the ballot?

The ballot may or may not put an end to canvassing: it would, however, deprive it to a great extent of its illegitimate power. Nothing more degrading than the ordinary mode of canvassing at elections can by any possibility be conceived. Discussion among friends and neighbours there always will be—this is natural and legitimate. An organised canvass of the electoral body, followed by a sectional canvass in which unpledged voters are allotted to those who are able to "influence" them, is a proceeding alike disgraceful and opposed to all notions of English fair play. The result of such a

canvass under the *regime* of the ballot would, in all probability, be that many voters would promise all candidates alike and then exercise their own preferences.

Mr. Mill fears that the result of the ballot would be to weaken that respect for truth for which he maintains the English are pre-eminent over other nations. This would, indeed, be a serious result, but it may be fairly questioned whether open voting does not most effectually weaken respect for truth. What more pernicious lie can be conceived than that of the voter who, in open day, affirms that a candidate for whom he would not on any account vote unless compelled, is the most fit to be his representative in Parliament? Yet this is the constant and habitual result of open voting. Under the ballot he might, indeed, deceive his persecutor, but now the lie is told in the face of the whole constituency, and the solemn act of registering a vote is made the occasion of a flagrant falsehood.

Theoretically all parties condemn the use of undue influence, practically none hesitate to employ it. Some have sufficient decency to urge that they only resort to it in self-defence. The employment of voting papers has been advocated mainly as a means of checking mob violence; it is, however, certain that their introduction would vastly aid and augment a form of intimidation equally powerful and more objectionable. Intelligent Americans who have watched recent discussions in Parliament have said to the writer, "Why not try the ballot?"

Mr. Mill makes no reference whatever to the ballot as a means of checking bribery, although this is one of the principal arguments used by its supporters. The costliness of election contests is the greatest of existing evils, and, unless some check can be devised, threatens

to make Parliament still more than ever a rich man's club. As a general rule, the fewer the legitimate qualifications of a candidate the more readily does he resort to illegal means. Under the system of open voting elections have become a periodical saturnalia, disgraceful alike to civilization and Christianity.

It is true that election agents assert that they would have no difficulty in bribing if the ballot were in operation. Some have even gone so far as to assert that they could do so more easily than with open voting. It is, however, a striking fact that, almost unanimously, they are opposed to its introduction. This alone would lead to the inference that the ballot would check, if it did not eradicate, their nefarious practices.

There are burglars so skilled as to defy the most perfect locks, but no one dreams that burglaries would be less frequent if locks were abolished. In like manner there may be moral burglars, so skilled as to bribe successfully, under secret voting, but the number of them would be small compared with those who now operate upon constituencies. The great guarantee of the briber is the publication of the votes: remove this and bribery would be lessened. The man who will take a bribe from one candidate will not scruple to do so from all, and hence the knowledge of the way in which the vote is exercised is the safeguard of corruption.

The question of corruption at elections was discussed in April, 1864, at a meeting of the Social Science Association, when Mr. Edwin Chadwick, C.B., said: "At the International Statistical Congresses which I have attended, I have taken occasion to make inquiries from the delegates as to the electoral procedure in their respective states. There were, they said, occasional complaints, more or less well founded, of the exercise

of irregular influences, though not very considerable, by parties in getting up voters; but neither in France, nor in Belgium, nor in Holland, nor in the chief cantons of Switzerland, in respect to which I made inquiries, was there any such bribery, nor indeed any practice of individual bribery, nor any such extravagant electoral expenses as are known to be so common as almost to be general in England. I say there was no individual bribery, for there were occasionally instances of what was considered collective bribery, by candidates promising, if they were elected, to get a railway carried in their direction, or to do something for their peculiar local advantage. In those countries the gross debauchery and rioting at our elections, as well as the excessive expenditure, any getting in of "third men" for the sake of the electoral expenditure in contests—such scenes as those at the last election in Brighton—are subjects of surprise and disparaging comment." Mr. Chadwick ascertained that in France four or five hundred francs are the usual amount of a candidate's expenses, and that double that sum, or thirty or forty pounds, would be open to challenge as irregular. He added: "In the Continental examples to which I have referred for the absence of any practice of bribery, it is due to state that in each instance the ballot was in use. It is due also to state on testimony of persons, like myself, who had filled public executive offices, and were in neutral positions, as well as of persons of the classes which were highly Conservative, that the ballot was deemed to work on the whole most satisfactorily."

One great advantage, if not the chief good, of the ballot would be the ignorance in which candidates and committees would be kept as to the state of the poll during the progress of the election. Corruption gene-

rally runs riot on the day of poll, promises are withheld until it is seen how the polling goes, and, in close contests, the highest prices are obtained when there is a neck-and-neck race. It would be little use making up a canvass book if the votes were secret. Candidates in that case would have to depend upon their legitimate qualifications, and there would consequently be a great diminution, if not an extinction, of corrupt practices. It might also be necessary, to pass other stringent enactments to prevent bribery, but there can be no doubt that the ballot would prove a powerful auxiliary in that beneficial work.

The question assumes greatly increased importance in view of the adoption of household suffrage. If those constituencies in which there are the greatest number of poor voters were the freest from corruption, there would be some hope that an extension of the franchise would remedy the evil. Experience, however, proves that this is not the case, and it becomes a serious question whether the new electors are to be exposed to all the temptations which the present race has not been able to resist, or whether the law shall not effectually guard them from temptation. The extension of the franchise without security for its free exercise will most probably extend widely the existing evils of our electoral system.

The great defect in Mr. Mill's argument arises from the fact that he reasons from erroneous and imperfect data. If he will consult those who take an active part in the management of elections, he will find that all the evils for which the ballot was urged as a remedy thirty years ago are still rampant. In the bulk of the constituencies they are by no means diminished in extent and influence. It is in the largest boroughs alone that

genuine independence may be said to exist. None of the objectionable means we have been considering habitually influence the result of elections in the Metropolis, Birmingham, Manchester, and places of similar extent. These, however, are exceptional cases, upon which it is impossible to found a correct opinion as to the necessity for secret voting.

It has long been the profound conviction of the radical party that the ballot is required to prevent intimidation, corruption, and violence, and secure real freedom of election. That conviction will be by no means weakened by the arguments adduced in Mr. Mill's work. Their effect will be confined exclusively to strengthening the opponents of the ballot. His name will be employed as an additional reason for opposing a salutary measure, even by those who do not believe in his arguments. The task of securing freedom of election by means of secret voting may thereby be rendered more difficult, and will require more determined effort. In the end, however, the advocates of the ballot must triumph, and by its introduction a death-blow will be struck at every influence which is adverse to freedom and purity of election.

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